

In a glimpse

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CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ON ONLINE SPORTS BETTING

Online sports betting has significantly expanded since 2015. Besides its popularity and ease of access, several factors have contributed to the dynamism of this activity: repeated technological advances, the financial profits generated, the opening up of online gambling to competition, the impact of sports betting advertising and promotional inducements on gambling behaviour, as well as the attractiveness of the wagering products, which is constantly being refreshed. Although this gambling practice raises questions, particularly about its potential addictive nature, current knowledge about so-called “problem” sports betting remains largely unknown. However, the dissemination of available knowledge and the development of dedicated research work are a major challenge for the scientific community, public authorities and health care actors, in order to inform policy to protect vulnerable populations and prevent excessive gambling behaviour.

Based on a review of the international literature, this report presents a summary of the work done on seven issues:

- The effective dissemination of sports betting and its evolution.
- Problem behaviour among sports bettors.
- Associated risk factors (socio-demographic, behavioural and psychological).
- The motivations and perceptions of sports bettors.
- The characteristics of the gambling products and their potential addictive power.
- The influence of marketing, advertising strategies and financial rewards.
- The emerging disparities between countries (regulation, supply, behaviour).

A series of strong conclusions emerge, the first being that the categories for observing this phenomenon are very unstable. Consequently, the quantification of gambling practices comes up against limits of comparability between surveys and between countries. Although the levels of gambling are contrasting, they nevertheless converge in the direction of an increase in risky practices.

The literature mainly addresses the issue of problematic use of sports betting. Although the data is incomplete among the general population, “excessive” practices have nevertheless been noted, in particular through surveys of Internet users.

Another point of interest in the literature concerns the profile of bettors who develop a gambling problem. They are characterised by common socio-demographic factors: they are mostly men, single or cohabiting, in their thirties, educated and working full time. These traits are also found among sports bettors seeking treatment for gambling disorders. Furthermore, individuals classified as “problem” gamblers (moderate-risk and excessive gambling) also share common behavioural features: they more often have several accounts with different operators, bet more and spend more money, and are more sensitive to promotional inducements, showing an impulsive behaviour little or not present in the other gambling profiles. Finally, so-called “problem” sports bettors are more likely to be addicted to alcohol, have weaker control skills, more difficulty in regulating their emotions, as well as erroneous cognitive representations regarding their real chances of success in each game.

A point that has been addressed but little explored in the literature concerns the attractiveness of the offer. Research studies are more scattered and highlight new characteristics of gambling products recently developed by the betting industry, which bring them closer to the operating mechanisms of slot machines, which are highly criticised for their addictive power. In order to determine the role of these latest innovations in the exacerbation of excessive gambling practices, researchers stress the need for new empirical investigations, notably on the impact of the structural components of sports betting (frequency of betting, intensity of play and speed of winning mechanisms) and of the new situational characteristics (location of the gambling venue, number of accessible gambling venues and visual, written elements, etc. used by the gambling operators).

Numerous research studies have examined the influence of advertising and promotional strategies on gambling behaviour. This literature sheds major light on the audiences most at risk - young people and problem gamblers - based in particular on content analysis studies of these marketing strategies. The themes and values most often emphasised are humour, friendship, entertainment, commitment to their sports team and the absence of risk. The element of skill in the game is emphasised in the advertising messages, while the actual chances of success are relegated to the background. In addition, studies point to the use of increasingly diverse advertising techniques and financial rewards. Bettors testify to the pressure of advertising and the pervasiveness of commercial inducements on every media lever, and the influence they have on their attitudes and intentions to gamble.

Further reading (in French)

Literature review: [État des connaissances sur les paris sportifs en ligne](#), 25 p.